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TODAY AT THE FESTIVAL

FREE SHOWS

4 and 7 p.m. Chango Family Circus, Le Monde Forain.
4 to 11 p.m. Karaoke, Tente Karaoké Le Lait.
5 p.m. Steve Normandin, Le Monde Pop Le Lait.
6 p.m. Prohom, Claire Ford Focus.
7 p.m. Les Denis Drolet, Le Monde Trad Desjardins/Radio-Canada.
8 and 10 p.m. Polémil Bazac, Le Monde Pop Le Lait.
8 and 10 p.m. Orchestre Bembeya Jazz, Le Monde Multiculturel Hydro-Québec, Pavillon culturel Hydro-Québec.
9 p.m. Les Cowboys Fringants, La Zone Hip Bleue Dry, Parc des Festivals.
9 and 11 p.m. Collectivo, Claire Ford Focus.

TICKETED SHOWS

8:00 p.m. Diane Tell, Club Soda, 1225 St. Laurent Blvd. Cost: $29.50.

FILM

7 p.m. Joséphine, Kacha Kompio; Épopée, National Film Board, 1564 St. Denis St. Cost: $5 to $7.
9 p.m. Je chante pour ... avec Gilles Vigneault: "C'est la première fois que j'ai chanté" - Félix Leclerc, National Film Board, 1564 St. Denis St. Cost: $5 to $7.

OUTDOOR STAGES

L'aire Ford Focus, corner Jeanne Mance and Ste. Catherine Sts.
La Zone Hip Bleue Dry, corner Bleury St. and de Maisonneuve Blvd.
Le Monde Pop Le Lait, in front of Complexe Desjardins on Ste. Catherine St.
Le Monde Trad Desjardins/Radio-Canada, on Jeanne Mance St. between de Maisonneuve Blvd. and Ste. Catherine St.
Le Monde Multiculturel Hydro-Québec, on Ste. Catherine St., corner of Clark St.
Le Monde Forain, on the northwest esplanade of Place des Arts.
Tente Karaoké Le Lait, on the northeast esplanade of Place des Arts.

Tickets available at:
Admission, call (514) 790-1245 or visit www.admission.com
Archambault, 500 Ste. Catherine St. W. Call (514) 281-1060.
Place des Arts, (514) 842-2112
Club Soda, 1225 St. Laurent Blvd. Call (514) 790-1111.
Monument National, 1182 St. Laurent Blvd. (514) 871-2224.
Metropolis, 59 Ste. Catherine St. E. Call (514) 844-3500.
Cabaret, 2111 St. Laurent Blvd. Call (514) 845-2014.

INFORMATION

For more details on the festival, call (514) 679-8989 or 1 (888) 444-9114, or visit www.francofolies.com

COURTESY OF LES FRANCOFOLIES

Diane Tell has 25 years to cover.

BEST BET

Diane Tell comes home

Diane Tell (8:30 p.m., Club Soda, 1225 St. Laurent Blvd.). If you want to escape the tens of thousands expected to attend tonight's free show by Les Cowboys Fringants (at La Zone Hip Bleue Dry at 9), Diane Tell's homecoming to Montreal (she's lived in France for years) promises to be an intimate affair.

Backed only by Robbie McIntosh, formerly of the Pretenders and Paul McCartney's band, Tell will be spinning a 25-year career retrospective to coincide with her remastered BMG compilation, Tout de Diane Tell. Tickets cost $29.50.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

NOTES FROM LES FRANCOFOLIES

There's no catching the wolf

LELOUP STAYS WILD

Alexis HK unites old and new worlds

Plein à craquer is, I believe, the expression. Metropolis was jammed Friday night for the annual FrancoFolies appearance (the first of two sold-out shows) by free-spirited Quebec rocker Jean Leloup, this time with his Big Band.

Well, the four horns and four backup singers – plus bass, drums and keys – did their best to keep up but, as usual, the Wolf was wily and wild.

Leloup is a captivating performer. On stage, like on album, he captures the imagination of his audience, and scampers into the night.

He built his anti-love anthem La Vie est laide in magically haphazard fashion. First, he beckoned the audience to clap an up-tempo beat – a task they literally jumped to. Then, looking around, he motioned his singers to join with the familiar, mood theme, as the band tried to find its place. Just as the whole thing appeared to be falling apart, it took off. The chorus, screamed by all with life-affirming joy: "La vie est laid de! Laid-de!"

In the crowd was Leloup pal and Bran Van man James Di Salvio, who leaned in with the following greeting:

"Happy summer."

TCHA DUNLEVY

✦✦✦

Three songs into her sold-out show at the Spectrum last night, Ariane Moffatt was on the drums – not the first place you'd expect to find the cheeky trip-pop starlet, but it wasn't totally out of character. She has a voice to melt your heart, and with it comes a playful, un-self-conscious demeanour that says she's up for anything.

Moffatt alternated between guitar and piano for the rest of the evening, and played songs from her dreamy debut, Aquanaute. As evidenced by the full house, she has come a long way since giving her first solo performance outdoors at last year's FrancoFolies.

People could be seen mouthing the words to most of her songs, and cheers erupted for many favourites. She has a knack for pretty melodies. More impressively, she has the ability to get lost in a moment.

During the up-tempo Sur ton parallèle, she did a vocal ad lib over a driving, Latin-house beat. Then, her face scrunched with effort and pleasure, she etched out a solo on the piano.

The spontaneous standing ovation at the first encore was entirely deserved. Delirium broke out as a very special guest emerged for the next song. It was none other than Moffatt's mentor, Daniel Bélanger. They were a perfect match, him on acoustic guitar and her on piano. Their voices flirted playfully, and she more than held her own. One senses that Moffatt's star will continue to rise.

TCHA DUNLEVY

✦✦✦

Punk, that most indestructible of genres, gets transmogrified when it's spewed in French, the former international language of diplomacy. Les Wampas, punk monarchs of France after 20 years, say they try not to think about it – but this is still France we're talking about.

On a rainy Saturday night at La Zone Hip Bleue Dry, when wiry, weathered Didier Wampas stuck the mic in his mouth and tried vainly to enunciate his bon mots while strumming his guitar and wading into the crowd's arms, well, perhaps we were seeing the birth of punk Esperanto (to be gargled, not spoken). His phonetically pompous and disgusted French spew sounds just right for today's politically absurd times, neither phony nor affected. Just as France has always been a connoisseur's refuge for classic Americana, Les Wampas glom surf, country, garage and an anything-goes spirit. The detritus of pop culture is in good hands – mockery as a force of human nature. Unconscious but encyclopedic guitar riffs come courtesy of Philippe Almosnino.

By the end, bodyguards and fans alike propped up Didier on a plastic chair in the middle of the crowd. He thanked them for coming to see them in the rain – Les Wampas has their own Woodstock. As one teen fan summed up to her girlfriend: "Oi, oi, rock 'n' roll, moi je dis rock 'n' rule."

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

✦✦✦

Little bemused smiles were etched on the faces of several hundred people who turned out for the North American debut of Alexis HK at the Monde Trad stage on a beautiful Friday twilight. His folksong-based stories are peopled by imaginary characters with improbable fantasies – a midget who flies, meek guy Mitch becoming renowned as a fighter.

Clad in black suit, shirt and tie, the lantern-jawed Alexis (Djoshkounian) contrasted his devastatingly handsome matinée-idol looks with a mock little-boy-lost expression. He and his quartet, also black-clad, are stop-on-a-dime pros with chamber-music rigour, knowing what not to play, choosing their flourishes craftily.

Alexis HK's jaunty melodies are a throwback to 1940s and '50s musette, but his timing is just off-kilter enough to inhabit the past-modern world. Almost cartoonishly out of time, this beautifully paced show cast a spell of mutual discovery in old and new worlds.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

✦✦✦

"I travel around the world wearing Serge's songs like a flag," announced Jane Birkin, in a dutiful schoolgirl voice, of her former lover and companion Gainsbourg at a Spectrum overflowing with fans on Saturday night. Slinking about in a black off-the-shoulder dance top and off-the-hip charcoal gray sport slacks, the lean 56-year-old was all ballet and belles fleurs – the eternal gamine tripping about, bestowing kisses and hugs on her musicians.

If you can get past them, Birkin makes her vocal shortcomings a tremulous plus and has the sense to let her musicians weave a hypnotic Arabic spell. She told sweet stories of Serge, and had fans reaching for their mouchoirs when she read poems from Anno, her 20-year-old nephew who died last year in a car accident. In the last third of the show she wore the tight-fitting crimson dress depicted on the cover of her acclaimed CD Arabesque (which she's touring globally through next year).

The whole package was showbiz sleight of hand at its best and, occasionally, sweary worst), creating an ethereal, here-today-gone-tomorrow experience.

As Birkin finished wrapping herself in a blanket of Gainsbourg, Juliette Gréco was instinctually delivering his Accordéon and La Javanaise, at a Salle Wilfrid Pelletier filled with middle-aged and elderly local bourgeois bohemians. The differences were remarkable. Gréco, 76, is so transported by the music that she doesn't fuss with every word; some just faded as quickly as they came. Her trademark arm waves and pirouetting wrists were hung reflexively to the music, as if she had no control over them. Just standing there in black, she was the music.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

✦✦✦

One of the intriguing backdrops to tonight's free concert by Les Cowboys Fringants is whether La Zone Hip Bleue Dry can handle the crowd. What if it doubles the expected 20,000? This is a band with a Grateful Dead-like following that's entered into mainstream Quebec folklore. Everybody's rooting for them, whether they wear toques or not (the recent concert set Attache ta tuque! having sold 15,000 while Break Syndical rolls over 85,000 sales). This is, after all, Quebec's most popular band, which recently attracted 250,000 to St. Jean Baptiste festivities at the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City.

"They're ready," said Marie-Christine Champagne, publicist for their record label, La Tribu. "They seem to accept that they're in this mainstream of success and they're trying to enjoy it as much as possible."

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

PIERRE OBENDRAUF THE GAZETTE

Jean Leloup brought his Big Band to a packed Metropolis on Friday and Saturday. On stage, like on album, he captures the imagination.

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